

THE PRINCE OF GRAUSTARK

By
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"Beverly of Graustark," Etc.

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CHAPTER VIII. On Board the Jupiter.

GRAY day at sea. The decks of the Jupiter were wet with the almost invisible drizzle that filled the air, yet they were swarming with the busy pedestrians who never lose an opportunity to let every one know that they are on board. New York was twenty-four hours astern, and the brief Sunday service had come to a peaceful end.

Three tall, interesting looking men stood leaning against the starboard rail of the promenade deck, unmindful of the mist, watching the scurrying throng of exercise fiends. Two were young, the third was old, and of the three there was one who merited the second glance that invariably was bestowed upon him by the circling passers-by.

He stood between the gaunt soldierly old man with the fierce mustache and the trim, military young man with one that was close cropped and smart. Each wore a blue serge suit and affected a short visored cap of the same material, and each lazily puffed at a very commonplace briar pipe.

The customary he gossip and perennial snooper who is always making the voyage no matter what ship one takes or the direction one goes, nosed out the pursuer and discovered that the young man was R. Schmidt of Vienna. He was busy thereafter mixing with the throng, volunteering information that had not been solicited, but which appeared to be welcome. Especially were the young women on board grateful to the he gossip when he accosted them as a perfect stranger to tell them the name of another and even more perfect stranger.

"I am sorry we lost those rooms on the Salammbô," said the younger of his two companions. "I had them positively engaged, money paid down."

"Some one else came along with more money, Dank," observed R. Schmidt. "We ought to be thankful that we received anything at all. Has it occurred to you that this boat isn't crowded?"

"Not more than half full," said the older man. "All of the others appeared to be packed from hold to funnel. This must be an unpopular boat."

"I don't know where we'd be, however, if Mr. Blithers hadn't thought of the Jupiter almost at the last minute," said R. Schmidt.

"Nine day boat, though," growled the old man.

"I don't mind that in the least. She's a steady old tub, and that's something."

"Hobbs tells me that it is most extraordinary to find the eastbound steamers crowded at this season of the year," said Dank. "He can't understand it at all. The crowds go over in June and July, and by this time they should be starting for home. I thought we'd have no difficulty in getting on any one of the big boats, but, by jove, everywhere I went they said they were full up."

"It was uncommonly decent of Blithers not coming down to see us off," said the elderly man, who was down on the passenger list as Totten. "I was apprehensive, 'pon my soul. I stuck like a leech up to the last minute."

R. Schmidt was reflecting. "It struck me as queer that he had not heard of the transfer of our securities in London."

"I cannot understand Bernstein & Sons selling out at a time when the price of our bonds is considerably below their actual value," said Totten, frowning. "A million pounds sterling is what their holdings really represented, according to the dispatches they must have sold at a loss of nearly £50,000."

"We should have a Marconigram to-night or tomorrow in regard to the bid made in Paris for the bonds held by the French syndicate," said Dank, pulling at his short mustache. "Mr. Blithers is investigating."

"There is something sinister in all this," said R. Schmidt. "Who is buying up all of the outstanding bonds, and what is behind the movement? London has sold all that were held there, and Paris is approached on the same day. If Paris and Berlin should sell, nearly £4,000,000 in Graustark bonds will be in the hands of people whose identity and motives appear to be shrouded in the deepest mystery."

"And £4,000,000 represents the entire amount of our bonds held by outside parties," said Totten, with a significant shake of his grizzled head. "The remainder are in the possession of our own institutions and the people themselves. We should hear from Edelweiss, too, in response to my cablegram. Perhaps Romano may be

able to throw light on the situation. I confess that I am troubled."

A steward was politely accosting the trio.

"I beg pardon, is this Mr. Totten?"

"Yes."

"Message for you, sir, at the purser's."

"Bring it to my stateroom, Totten,"

said R. Schmidt briefly, and the old man hurried away on the heels of the messenger.

The two young men sauntered carelessly in an opposite direction and soon disappeared from the deck. A few minutes later Totten entered the luxurious parlor of R. Schmidt and laid an unopened wireless message on the table at the young man's elbow.

"Open it, Totten."

"The old man slit the envelope and glanced at the contents. He nodded his head in answer to an unspoken question."

"Sold?" asked R. Schmidt.

"Paris and Berlin, both of them, prince. Every bond has been gobbled up."

"Does he mention the name of the buyer?"

"Only by the use of the personal pronoun. He says: 'I have taken over the Paris and Berlin holdings. All is well.' It is signed 'B.' So! Now we know."

R. Schmidt indulged in a wry little smile. "It amounts to nearly \$20,000,000, count. That's a great deal of money to spend in the pursuit of an idle whim."

"Humph!" grunted the old count, and then favored the sunny faced prince with a singularly sharp glance.

"Of course you understand his game?"

"Perfectly. It's as clear as day. He intends to be the crown father-in-law. I suppose he will expect Graustark to establish an Order of Royal Grandfathers."

"It may prove to be no jest, Robin," said the count seriously.

"My dear Quinnox, don't look so sad," cried the prince. "He may have

money enough to buy Graustark, but he hasn't enough to buy grandchildren that won't grow, you know."

Count Quinnox looked at the prince rather pityingly. "It appears to be his way of pulling the strings, my boy. He has loaned us something like \$16,000,000. We have agreed to deposit our public service bonds as security against the loan, so that practically equalizes the situation. It becomes a purely business transaction, but he sees far ahead. This loan of his matures at practically the same time that our first series of government bonds are due for payment. It will be extremely difficult for a small country, such as Graustark, to raise nearly \$40,000,000 in ten years. The European syndicates undoubtedly would be willing to renew the loan under a new issue. I think it is called refunding or something of the sort. But Mr. Blithers will be in a position to say no to any such arrangement. He holds the whip hand and—"

"But, my dear count," interrupted the prince, "what if he does hold it? Does he expect to wait ten years before exercising his power? You forget that marriage is his ambition. Isn't he taking a desperate risk in assuming that I will not marry before the ten years are up? And, for that matter, his daughter may decide to wed some other chap who—"

"That's just the point," said Quinnox. "He is arranging it so that you can't marry without his consent."

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ant was not given to persiflage.

"Shall we send a wireless to Blithers congratulating him on his coup?"

Inquired the prince gayly.

"No," said the count. "Congratulating ourselves on his coup is better."

"Good! And you might add that we also are trusting to luck. It may give him something to think about. And now where is Hobbs?" said royalty.

"Here, sir," said Hobbs, appearing in the bedroom door.

"Thank you, Hobbs. You may order luncheon for us in the Ritz restaurant. The head waiter has been instructed to reserve the corner table for the whole voyage."

In two minutes Hobbs was back with the information that two ladies had taken the table and refused to be dislodged, although the head waiter had vainly tried to convince them that it was reserved for the passage by R. Schmidt and party.

"I am quite sure, sir, he put it to them very agreeably and politely, but the young lady gave 'im the 'toughest look I've ever seen on mortal face, sir, and he came back to me so 'umble that I could 'ardly believe he was the 'ead waiter."

"I hope he was not unnecessarily persistent," said the prince, annoyed.

"It really is of no consequence where we sit."

"Ladies first, world without end," said Dank. "Especially at sea."

Twenty minutes later R. Schmidt, seated in the Ritz restaurant, happened to look fairly into the eyes of the loveliest girl he had ever seen, and on the instant forgave the extraordinary delinquency of the hitherto infallible Hobbs.

Later on R. Schmidt sat alone in a sheltered corner of the promenade deck, where chairs had been secured by the forehand Hobbs. The thin drizzle now aspired to something more definite in the shape of a steady down-pour, and the decks were almost deserted save for the few who huddled in the unexposed nooks where the sweep and swish of the rain failed to penetrate. There was a faraway look in the young man's eyes, as of one who dreams pleasantly with little effort, but excellent effect. His pipe had gone out, so his dream must have been long and uninterrupted. Eight bells sounded. But what is time to a dreamer? Then came one bell and two, and now his eyes were closed.

Two women came and stood over him, but little did they suspect that his dream was of one of them—the one with the lovely eyes and the soft brown hair. They surveyed him, whispering, the one with a little perplexed frown on her brow, the other with distinct signs of annoyance in her face. The girl was not more than twenty, her companion quite old enough to be her mother, a considerate if not complimentary estimate, for a girl's mother may be either forty, fifty or even fifty-five when you come to think of it.

They were looking for something. That was quite clear. And it was deplorably clear that whatever it was R. Schmidt was sitting upon it. They saw that he was asleep, which made the search if not the actual recovery quite out of the question. The older woman was on the point of poking the sleeper with the toe of her shoe, being a matter of fact sort of person, when the girl imperatively shook her head and frowned upon the lady in a way to prove that, even though she was old enough to be the mother of a girl of twenty, she was by no means the mother of this one.

At that very instant R. Schmidt opened his eyes. It must have been a kindly poke by the god of sleep that aroused him so opportunely; but, even so, the toe of a shoe could not have created a graver catastrophe than that which immediately befell him. He completely lost his head. If one had suddenly asked what had become of it he couldn't have told, not for the life of him. For that matter he couldn't have put his finger, so to speak, on any part of his person and proclaimed with confidence that it belonged to R. Schmidt of Vienna. He was looking directly up into a pair of dark, startled eyes, in which there was a very pretty confusion and a far from impervious blink.

"I beg your pardon," said the older woman without the faintest trace of embarrassment—indeed, with some asperity—"I think you are occupying one of our chairs."

He scrambled out of the steamer rug and came to his feet, blushing to the roots of his hair.

"I beg your pardon," he stammered and found his awkwardness rewarded by an extremely sweet smile—in the eyes of the one he addressed.

"We were looking for a letter that I am quite sure was left in my chair," said she.

"A letter?" he murmured vaguely and at once began to search with his eyes.

"From her father," volunteered the elderly one, as if it were a necessary bit of information. Then she jerked the rug away, and three pairs of eyes examined the place where R. Schmidt had been reclining. "That's odd. Did you happen to see it when you sat down, sir?"

"I am confident that there was no letter," began he and then allowed his gaze to rest on the name card at the top of the chair. "This happens to be my chair, madam," he went on, pointing to the card. "R. Schmidt. I am very sorry."

"The steward must have put that card there while you were at luncheon, dear. What right has he to sell our chairs over again? I shall report this to the captain."

"I am quite positive that this is my chair, sir," said the girl, a red spot in each cheek. "It was engaged two days ago. I have been occupying it since—but it really doesn't matter. It

has your name on it now, so I suppose I shall have to—"

"Not at all," he made haste to say. "It is yours. There has been some miserable mistake. These deck stewards are always messing things up. Still, it is rather a mystery about the letter. I assure you I saw no—"

"No doubt the steward who changed the cards had sufficient intelligence to remove all incriminating evidence," said she coolly. "We shall find it among the lost, strayed and stolen articles, no doubt. Pray retain the chair, Mr.—" She peered at the name card—"Mr. Schmidt."

Her cool insolence succeeded in nettling a nature that was usually most gentle. He spoke with characteristic directness.

"Thank you, I shall do so. We thereby manage to strike a fair average. I seize your deck chair, you seize my table. We are quits."

She smiled faintly. "R. Schmidt did not sound young and gentle, but old and hateful. That is why I seized the table. I expected to find R. Schmidt a fat old German with very bad manners. Instead, you are neither fat, old nor disagreeable. You took it very nicely, Mr. Schmidt, and I am undone. Won't you permit me to restore your table to you?"

CHAPTER IX.

The Prince Chats With Miss Guile.

THE elderly lady was tapping the deck with a most impatient foot. "Really, my dear, we were quite within our rights in approaching the head waiter. He—"

"He said it was engaged," interrupted the young lady. "R. Schmidt was the name he gave, and I informed him it meant nothing for me. I am very sorry, Mr. Schmidt. I suppose it was all because I am so accustomed to having my own way."

"In that case it is all very easy to understand," said he, "for I have always longed to be in a position where I could have my own way. I am sure that if I could have it I would be a most overbearing, selfish person."

"We must inquire at the office for the letter, dear, before—"

"It may have dropped behind the chair," said the girl.

"Right!" cried R. Schmidt, dragging the chair away and pointing in triumph at the missing letter. He stooped to recover the missive, but she was quick to forestall him. With a little gasp she pounced upon it and, like a child, proceeded to hold it behind her back. He stiffened. "Remember that you said it was from your father."

She hesitated an instant and then held it forth for his inspection, rather adroitly concealing the postmark with her thumb. It was addressed to "Miss B. Guile, S. S. Jupiter, New York City, N. Y.," and typewritten.

"It is only fair that we should be quits in every particular," she said, with a frank smile.

He bowed. "A letter of introduction," he said, "in the strictest sense of the word. You have already had my card thrust upon you, so everything is quite regular. And now it is only right and proper that I should see what has become of your chairs. Permit me—"

"Really, Miss Guile," interposed her companion, "this is quite irregular. I may say it is unusual. Pray allow me to suggest—"

"I think it is only right that Mr. Schmidt should return good for evil," interrupted the girl gayly. "Please inquire, Mr. Schmidt. No doubt the deck steward will know."

Again the prince bowed, but this time there was amusement instead of uncertainty in his eyes. It was the first time that any one had ever urged him, even by inference, to "fetch and carry." Moreover, she was extremely cool about it, as one who expects much of young men in serge suits and outing caps. He found himself wondering what she would say if he were to suddenly announce that he was the Prince of Graustark. The thought tickled his fancy, accounting, no doubt, for the even deeper bow that he gave her.

"They can't be very far away," he observed quite meekly. "Oh, I say, steward! One moment, here." A deck steward approached with alacrity. "What has become of Miss Guile's chair?"

The young man touched his cap and beamed joyously upon the fair young lady.

"Ach! See how I have forgot! It is here! The best place on the deck—on any deck. See! Two—side by side—above the door, away from the draft—see, in the corner, ha, ha! Yes! Two by side. The very best. Miss Guile complains of the draft from the door. I exchanged the chairs. See! But I forgot to speak. Yes! See!"

And, sure enough, there were the chairs of Miss Guile and her companion snugly stowed away in the corner, standing at right angles to the long row that lined the deck, the foot rests pointed directly at the chair R. Schmidt had just vacated, not more than a yard and a half away.

"How stupid!" exclaimed Miss Guile. This is much better. So sorry, Mr. Schmidt, to have disturbed you. I abhor drafts, don't you?"

"Not to the extent that I shall move out of this one," he replied gallantly. "Now that I've got an undisputed claim to it. Are you not going to sit down, now that we've captured the disappearing chair?"

"No," she said, and he fancied he saw regret in her eyes. "I am going to my room—if I can find it. No doubt it also is lost. This seems to be a day for misplacing things."

"At any rate, permit me to thank you for discovering me, Miss Guile."

"Oh, I daresay I shall misplace you, too, Mr. Schmidt," she said so insolently that he flushed as he drew himself up and stepped aside to allow

her to pass. For an instant their eyes met, and the sign of the humble was not to be found in the expression of either.

"Even that will be something for me to look forward to, Miss Guile," said he. Far from being vexed, she favored him with a faint smile of—was it wonder or admiration?

Then she moved away, followed by the uneasy lady—who was old enough to be her mother and wasn't.

Robin remained standing for a moment, looking after her, and somehow he felt that his dream was not yet ended. She turned the corner of the deck building and was lost to sight. He sat down, only to arise almost instantly, moved by a livelier curiosity than he ever had felt before. Conscious of a certain feeling of stealth, he scrutinized the cards in the backs of the two chairs. The steward was collecting the discarded steamer runs farther down the deck, and the few passengers who occupied chairs appeared to be snoozing—all of which he took in with his first appraising glance. "Miss Guile" and "Mrs. Gaston" were the names he read.

"Americans," he mused. "Young lady and chaperon, that's it. A real American beauty! And Blithers loudly boasts that his daughter is the

prettiest girl in America! Shades of Venus! Can there be such a thing on earth as a prettier girl than this one? Can nature have performed the impossible? Is America so full of lovely girls that this one must take second place to a daughter of Blithers? I wonder if she knows the Imperial Maid. I'll make it a point to inquire."

Moved by a sudden restlessness, he decided that he was in need of exercise. After completely circling the deck once he decided that he did not need the exercise after all. His walk had not benefited him in the least. He returned to his chair. As he turned into the dry, snug corner he came to an abrupt stop and stared. Miss Guile was sitting in her chair, neatly incased in a mummy-like sheath of gray that covered her slim body to the waist.

She was quite alone in her nook, and reading. An astonishing intrepidity induced him to speak to her after a lapse of five or six minutes, and so surprising was the impulse that he blurted out his question without preamble.

"How did you manage to get back so quickly?" he inquired.

She looked up, and for an instant there was something like alarm in her lovely eyes, as of one caught in the perpetration of a guilty act.

"I beg your pardon," she said, rather indistinctly.

"I was away less than eight minutes," he declared, and she was confronted by a wonderfully frank smile that never failed to work its charm. To his surprise, a shy smile grew in her eyes, and her warm red lips twitched uncertainly. He had expected a cold rebuff. "You must have dropped through the awning?"

"Your imagination is superior to that employed by the author of this book,"

he said. "I have already had my card thrust upon you, so everything is quite regular. And now it is only right and proper that I should see what has become of your chairs. Permit me—"

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